



Injurious & Poisonous Plants

One of the best ways to discover the scenic beauty of the Virgin Islands National Park is to hike one of our many trails. When hiking our tree-lined paths, you should be aware of the hazards you may encounter in this unknown environment. The plants shown below are some of the most common, but not all, of the injurious or poisonous plants in the VI. With any encounter in the wild “**Look, But Don’t Touch!**” is the best approach. Let common sense prevail. Many plants can look alike. Do not touch unknown plants or pick the fruits or flowers of any plants unless you are certain of its species. When something in nature is poisonous, it usually has some type of warning sign. Warning signs in plants often include red fruit, white or yellow berries, shiny leaves, milky sap, spines, thorns, hirsute or hairy, leaves, plants with seeds in a pod and plants with umbrella shaped flowers. Plants with these characteristics should be avoided. **Never eat the fruits of unknown plants!** Individual reactions to stings, abrasions and contact with poisonous plants will vary significantly depending on a person’s health, age, physical condition, allergies or medications he or she is taking. Infection can occur with even the most benign tropical injury. ******Medical attention should be sought immediately for any allergic reaction.**



Christmas-bush (*Comocladia dodonaea*) A small shrub, related to poison ivy, which grows well in open canopies and along trails. It is distinguished by its dark green spiny alternately arranged leaves. Often taking on a reddish hue this plant resembles holly. Contact with this plant and its sap may cause symptoms of burning, itching skin accompanied by swelling, irritation and itchy rash. This may last up to several weeks. Persons exhibiting allergic reaction should seek medical attention.



Manchineel or Death Apple (*Hippome mancinella*). This tree can reach heights of 60 ft. and is found near and on coastal beaches. This tree is distinguished by its shiny heart-shaped leaves with yellow veins. Manchineel is highly toxic. **Ingestion of the small green fruit, which resembles an apple, can cause Death!** Sap from the tree can cause severe burning and blistering of the skin. Standing under the tree during a rain storm can cause severe skin irritation, blisters and temporary blindness. Burning the tree can cause blindness. Avoid contact with this tree.



Stinging Nettle (*Tragia volubilis*) A twining vine that can be up to 9 ft long. It is typically found in disturbed areas, along trails and in moist forests. Stinging nettle has fine stinging hairs that produce instant pain and burning, rash and sometimes blisters when contact is made. To avoid contact stay on marked trails, wear socks or long pants and watch where you step.



Casha (*Acacia tortuosa* (shown) & *A. macracantha*) *Acacia* trees are found in drier areas along the coastline, adjacent to trails or on hillsides. These common trees can reach heights of 30 feet and have dozens of spines along the branches. Contact with the spines can cause deep puncture wounds, redness, painful swelling, localized pain and infection. Avoid grabbing onto branches when walking.



Jump-up-cactus or roving pricklypear (*Opuntia repens*) This small ground cactus is fairly common in dry forests. It is segmented into many fleshy pads covered by dozens of long, sharp, barbed spines. It is found in dense low growing clumps. This cactus will commonly become securely attached to clothing and shoes as one walks along paths or through the woods. Spines easily penetrate clothing becoming imbedded in skin. Spines can cause localized pain, inflammation, irritation and rash. Spines must be carefully removed to alleviate pain



Century Plant or Agave (*Agave missionum*) The century plant gets its name because it was reputed to bloom only once every 100 years. It does bloom only once in its lifetime, but usually within 10-20 years. The main plant dies after flowering, but produces an off-shoot that will grow to maturity. The century plant is a large perennial herb with gray/green leaves up to 8 feet long, which grow in a rosette formation. Each fibrous leaf has spiny margins and tips. This plant is typically found in drier soils along the coast or on rocky out-croppings. Contact with the spines can cause abrasions intense localized pain.



Pinguin or False Pineapple (*Bromelia pinguin*) The false pineapple was introduced to the Virgin Islands during the plantation era to serve as a natural defensive barrier or fence-line. It spreads quickly, forming dense impenetrable thickets. This large herb has long, slender, bright green leaves that grow in a rosette formation. Each leaf has spiny margin and tips. They are typically found adjacent to ruins and historic structures in thick impenetrable patches. Contact with this plant can cause scratches, cuts and shallow puncture wounds.



Catch & Keep (*Acacia riparia*) This common weed forms dense thickets of impenetrable thick, sinewy vine-like vegetation. It is found in arid areas and around disturbed sights particularly around historic structures. Covered in hundreds of hooked spines, catch and keep is aptly named for the ability of this plant to hook into and hold onto any animal or person that happens by. It can be avoided by staying on clearly marked, maintained trails. Barbed spines can penetrate skin causing dozens of cuts, irritation, redness, swelling and infection.



Jimson Weed, Prickly Burr & Deadly Nightshade (*Datura spp.*) This family includes several species of herbaceous, poisonous plants typically found along roadsides and disturbed areas. Distinguished by their umbrella-shaped flowers and round, prickly seed capsules they can grow to a height of five feet, preferring to grow in full sunlight. Toxicity of each plant varies according to species. **Warning! This plant is extremely toxic!** Ingestion of any part of the plant may cause delirium, increased heart rate, rapid breathing, amnesia & even **Death!**



Jumbie Bean, Crab's Eye or Rosary Pea (*Abrus precatorius*) A slender vine that can reach heights of 20 feet and is most commonly found in moist, well drained wooded areas, adjacent to clearings or disturbed areas and along roadsides. The bright red seeds have been used to make jewelry and percussion instruments.

Warning! Ingestion of the seeds may cause Death!



Pencil Euphorbia or Milk Bush (*Euphorbia tirucalli*) Pencil euphorbia is a small, shrub-like tree is used as an ornamental plant. Although, somewhat uncommon in the park, it may be found on park land adjacent to in-holdings. Distinguished by hundreds of bright green pencil-thin, cylindrical branches, it secretes a milky sap when cut or damaged. The latex-like sap can cause a skin irritation, severe rash and blisters as well as blindness if it gets in the eyes. It may also prove fatal if swallowed. Sensitivity to the sap will vary from person to person.